

**SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT  
WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION  
RECREATION ISSUES WORKSHOP, Monday, August 11, 2008  
5:00-8:15 P.M., B-1 Auditorium, 3301 Gun Club Road, West Palm Beach, FL**

**MEETING SUMMARY**

**NOTE: Next meeting previously scheduled for October 13, 2008: Osceola County Extension Service, Osceola Heritage Park, 1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane, Kissimmee, FL 5-8 or 9 p.m. has been changed to Monday, October 6, same time and place.**

This is a summary of the WRAC Recreation Issues Workshop on August 11, 2008, at the SFWMD Lower West Coast Service Center in Ft. Myers, FL. This report will be posted on <http://my.sfwmd.gov/wrac>.

**Future Presentations:**

- **Staff Proposals on Kissimmee Lakes Recreation and Public Access**

**Introduction:** David Lithgow, Chair, WRAC Recreation Issues, welcomed everyone, stated the purpose of the meeting, the function of the WRAC Issues Workshops, and asked people to introduce themselves.

**Item 2: Kissimmee Marsh Restoration Status – David Colangelo, Sr. Env. Scientist, Kissimmee Division, SFWMD:**

**Discussion:**

- **Chair:** Concerned about impact of drawdowns in restored river areas on marsh/floodplain. Need to do aquatic plant management and controlled burning. SFWMD: Kissimmee and Vegetation Management divisions are working together on that.
- Need to treat areas of Hickory Hammock for hyacinth, water lettuce and pennywort – area is badly infested.  
**SFWMD Division of Vegetation Management has been notified of this need.**
- Completion of next 19,300 feet of restoration? SFWMD: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers expects to have contractor mobilized next week.
- Time schedule for removing S65-C water control structure and completing backfill of river restoration sections is 2012 or 2013.

**Item 3: Kissimmee Chain of Lakes Recreation Development – Steve Coughlin, Div. Director, Land Stewardship, SFWMD:**

**Discussion:**

- **Chair:** SFWMD staff has been working to develop a recreation plan for Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, particularly for Lakes Kissimmee, Hatchineha and Cypress.

- Steve Coughlin summarized results of approximately six months of work in facilitated stakeholder meetings and presented areas of agreement and areas needing further work.
- **Areas of Agreement:**
  1. Designate hiking and kayaking trails. **Group agreed to move forward with this recommendation.**
  2. Prohibit the harvest of antlerless deer  
Discussion/questions included:
    - Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation commission (FWCC) should be responsible for this, based on scientific study.
    - 7-day doe season took toll on deer herd in Gardner marsh.
    - Science not being timely done. Need to protect the breeders and rebuild the herds.
    - Chair: Not necessary for SFWMD to take position – this is an FWCC issue. Can make the recommendation
    - FWCC: This is a very conservative approach. There is not much biological data available.
    - This was the only issue that got more than 75% approval at last stakeholder facilitated meeting.
    - **Group agreed to move forward with this recommendation.**
  3. Prohibit deer dogs; allow hog dogs and retrievers.
    - **Group agreed to move forward with this recommendation.**
  4. North and South marsh areas on East shore and West Shore of Lake Kissimmee proposed for small game, turkey, waterfowl, snipe, and hog hunting. Discussion and questions included:
    - This would prohibit use of center-fire rifles? Yes
    - Could hunt small game, turkey and hogs to fence lines? Yes.
    - **Group agreed to move forward with this recommendation.**
  5. Expand hunting on Rough Island and interior of Johnson Island Marsh. (See Discussion under “Use of Airboats – interior of Johnson Island, below.)
    - **Group agreed to move forward with this recommendation.**
  6. Establish hunting seasons through FWCC process, as follows:
    - 24 day archery;
    - 3 day muzzle loading;
    - 58 day general gun;
    - 55 day small game; and,
    - 37 day spring turkey. Discussion included:
      - Seemed good approach at time of facilitated meetings; with prohibition of doe season, now would rather see full length deer season with no doe season.

- This format was proposed by SFWMD and FWCC in straw man proposal, not by sporting interests.
  - Adjacent private lands should follow same rules.
  - Private land representative agreed.
  - Recommend rules and seasons same as for Kissimmee Public Use Area.
  - But this recommendation was to provide other user groups to have access and feel safe knowing there would be times when no hunting would be going on.
  - Issues raised in “Straw man Proposal” – but we don’t hunt deer in cold months. Hunting season is primarily September through December, not January, February and March.
  - Some recreation users are afraid to be in areas where hunting is going on.
  - **Chair:** trying to get access to additional 5,800 acres. Statewide season for additional areas is opening up new areas. **General agreement to adopt State wide hunting season dates in lieu of 24/3/58 hunting dates stated above.**
7. Recommend the FWCC establish the properties as a managed area, preferably a designation similar to the Kissimmee Public Use Area.
- FWCC clarification: most flexibility provided by “Public Use Area” or similar designation.
  - Sportsmen recommended wild hog hunting should be year round, daylight hours.
  - There did not appear to be full consensus on this issue and some participants pointed out not all interests were fully represented at this meeting.
  - In order for FWCC to develop rules, the area would need to be established as a managed area by FWCC.
- **Areas Needing More Work:**
    1. Open East Shore of Lake Kissimmee to Deer hunting (currently closed to hunting). Discussion included:
      - Stakeholder: according to FWCC, small game hunters are less than 1 percent of all hunters so it would only be opening up to small number of people.
      - **General agreement to keep it closed to deer hunting but open the two large marsh areas to small game, turkey, wild hogs and waterfowl.**
    2. Continuation of deer hunting on North and Northwest Shore of Lake Kissimmee. Discussion:
      - Due to width of area hard area to hunt safely with rifles. Leave it to small game.

- Land acquired with public funds and should be open to all recreation.
  - Thought facilitated group agreed to only allow shotgun/small game on narrow strips all the way around the lake.
  - Chair: No real consensus about whether to close areas currently open to deer hunting with rifles.
  - SFWMD: Will draft proposal based on comments and bring to next meeting.
3. Open 580-acre Drasdo Tract to hunting (currently closed). Discussion:
- Summary: Landowners want quota hunt system. Sportsmen do not support using the quota system for this area. Kayakers/campers/hikers would like to use it for those purposes and would support keeping it closed to hunting to avoid user conflicts.
  - Landowners concerned about opening to hunting without the use of quotas to limit the number of hunters on this parcel. It is a small area not viable for big game hunting and should be left as a preserve. Has scrub jays and other habitat value. Unregulated hunting would devastate the area.
  - Some conservation groups agree it should remain closed.
  - Hunting community stated there are many areas available for canoeing/kayaking/hiking where hunting is not allowed – Lake Kissimmee State Park, etc.
  - Landowner stated that the majority of people at last facilitated meeting agreed to keep Drasdo Unit closed to deer hunting and thought the Northwest Shore should be closed to deer hunting as well. Had six meetings, people invested a great deal of time. Many representatives who participated are not in attendance here. Now appears that all that would will be thrown away with vote today.
  - SFWMD: WRAC does not vote; not voting today. Nothing is being taken off the table. Trying to build on areas of agreement and continue work on areas needing consensus.
  - Compromise on table: primitive weapons – muzzle loaders and archery.
  - Many people don't fit in with hunting and like to go where hunting has not been done. Passive recreation users compromised a great deal in facilitated meetings. Support shared uses but believe some areas should be preserved and hunting not allowed. Need to leave Drasdo closed to hunting.
  - Sportsmen have to fight to get access. When SFWMD acquires land, passive uses planned from beginning. Any other uses have to be fought for.
  - Chair: **No consensus on Drasdo.**

- SFWMD will draft a proposal based on comments heard and bring to next WRAC RIW meeting.

4. Open Johnson Island Marsh to Airboating and Deer Hunting.

Discussion:

- SFWMD: 50 percent of area now closed to hunting. Proposal made at facilitated meetings to provide access via a “One-way-in-one-way-out” Airboat port and allow walk-in hunting from there.
- Stakeholder: Public access is allowed up to 52.5’ on Lake Kissimmee by statute. Dikes are illegal. Need to come down. Airboats can jump the levee but don’t want to get arrested for doing so. If can’t access this wet area, can’t hunt it.
- Now that lake levels are regulated, can’t keep enough water so important for levees to remain. The Nature Conservancy had mentioned problems with trespass into the Disney Wilderness Preserve.
- Chair: Issue is access, not hunting.
- If access provided would there be a problem with walk-in hunting? Restricting access to walk-in only would be difficult because of the interior canal and water in the marsh. Would agree with airboat port idea.
- Chair: Need to approach TNC with proposal to co-locate airboat port with road.
- **No agreement reached.** Staff will develop a proposal for consideration at next meeting.

- **Next Steps:**

- Staff will propose recommendations for areas of disagreement.
- Chair, Recreation Issues Workshop will update WRAC about status of these issues on September 4 in Ft. Myers.

**Item 4: Mobility Impaired Permits, Wes Seitz, Public Hunt Coordinator, FWCC – Discussion:**

- Stakeholder comment: If disabled, one can access some areas managed by FWCC through use of a special vehicle permit. It is limited and few areas validate it. Does this included disabled veterans?
- FWCC: Yes. The FWCC is working with the Veterans Administration to provide a clearinghouse for disabled veterans. In addition, the FWCC tries to accommodate other disabled/mobility impaired persons who are not veterans.

**Item 5: Land Stewardship Division Update – Dan Cotter, Planning Supervisor, DSL, SFWMD – Discussion:**

- Comment that Chandler Slough has only three access points and recreation users could get ticketed given current layout for access. Need to designate existing facility at Micco Landing with a walkover. Too much distance to walk to get access. Need to get staff up there to work this out. 100-yard safety boundary: Homeowner representative (representing all of the owners) agreed. Need to complete fencing. The Chandler Slough efforts are appreciated by many people.
- Istokpoga Boat Ramp: has a name been selected yet? Had heard it would be called Coleman Landing. Already have one. Need to consider Johnny Jones, who helped get Kissimmee Restoration through Congress, or the Audubon Game Warden who was killed protecting wildlife on the river. Don't need two "Coleman Landings".
- Will boat ramp provide access to the lake? No, to the Kissimmee River.
- SFWMD working to provide primitive camp site.
- SFWMD Lake Kissimmee boat ramp design now at 90%, final design completion subject to DEP permit issue date and requirements.

**Item 6: Recreation Planning Update, Jerry Krenz, Senior Planner, DSL, SFWMD - Discussion:**

- SFWMD comments on the CERP Master Recreation Plans have been submitted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- The Stormwater Treatment Area 1, West (STA-1, West) Public Access site was dedicated on July 16. Many activities have taken place there.
- SFWMD recommending closing public access area during waterfowl hunting on STA-1 West, one day/week during the hunting season (deals with 1,000' buffer area issue).
- On August 14, will request Governing Board approve waterfowl hunting for STA-2, 2008-09 season. (Note: On 8/14, Governing Board approved this item).
- STA-5: SFWMD announced adding access to STA 5 flow way 3, an additional 4 square miles, for alligator hunting.
- STA-5: Need to mow banks before waterfowl season.
- SFWMD: In STA 5 will close west ends of cells 1A and 2A for dredging of the L3 during alligator season, levee signs have been posted. Western portions in cell 1A may also be closed during parts of waterfowl season for a different construction project.
- Compartments B and C: In the Comp B boat ramp design, need floating dock to provide safe tie up. Welcome the improved access – this is a great fishery. Any way to cross S-7 and provide for launching tracked vehicles? SFWMD: No, cannot do that. Stakeholder: Access to Brown's Farm is being cut off and that is a traditional track vehicle area. Track vehicle owners living in Davie had access across Sportsman's Crossing, now have to go all the way around. Access is being removed and alternative access not being provided. SFWMD will

look for a possible solution and review the possible changes in hydroperiods

- Compartment C: Boat ramp still includes 17% slope in design? Yes. SFWMD: did not ask for change because won't need it based on water levels to be maintained in area.

**Future Meetings:**

- **NOTE: October 13, 2008: Osceola County Extension Service, Osceola Heritage Park, 1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane, Kissimmee, FL 5-8 or 9 p.m. has been changed to Monday, October 6, same time and place.**
- **December 15, 2008, Building B-1 Auditorium, West Palm Beach, FL, 5-8:00 p.m.**

**Meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.**